

(Part 3)

'For leaving them there, he departed from them eftsoons, and prayed as he did before, and kneeling upon his knees made his petition and said: O Father, if it be thy will, take away this cup from me, but yet not my will be done but thine.'

Now lo! doth he make the same prayer again, now doth he add the same condition again. Now doth he give us example again, that when we come in any great danger, yea though it be for God's sake, we should not reckon it unlawful for us continually to pray unto him graciously to deliver us therefrom, since it may so be that purposely he suffereth us to be brought in such extremity, that seeing prosperity made us so key-cold and dull to pray, fear of peril and danger should yet set us in an heat, namely being in hazard of bodily harm. For in the jeopardy of our soul are we the most part of us scantily but even lukewarm.

But for those that care for their soul's health, as each one of us ought to do, unless it be such a man as the mighty hand of God encourageth to martyrdom, which thing must either by some secret means be perceived, or else by some other reasonable ways be well tried and known, otherwise I say is it meet for these folk every man to stand in fear of himself, that he be not over-charged with his burden, that he fall therewith down-right; and therefore lest he, like as Peter did, trust over-much to himself, heartily must he beseech almighty God that he will of his goodness mercifully deliver his silly soul from so great danger. Nevertheless this one point must we keep still in remembrance, that we never so precisely pray to be preserved from peril, but that we commit the whole matter unto God, ready for our parts with all obedience patiently to accept whatsoever his pleasure shall be to appoint us.

Thus did Christ upon these considerations leave us a wholesome example in this wise to pray, whereas he for his own person was further from all such necessity of praying than the heaven is distant from the earth. For as he was God, he was equal with his Father, and in that he was God also, as he was of like power with his Father, so had he like will too. But as man was he in power very far beneath him. Howbeit at length all authority both in heaven and earth was by his Father delivered into his hands. And albeit inasmuch as he was man his will and his Father's will was not all one, yet unto his Father's will was his in every point so conformable, that never was he found to vary from the same; so far forth that his reasonable soul, obeying his Father's appointment, consented to suffer that most painful death; notwithstanding his bodily senses (to shew himself a very natural man) were full sore against it, as his own prayer lively expressed both these points at once, where he said: 'O Father, if it please thee, take away this cup from me, yet not my will be fulfilled but thine.'

Which two points yet not so clearly appeared by that he said, as by that he did. For that his reason refused not to endure that hideous horrible tormentry, but lowly obeyed his Father even to the death, and that unto the death of the cross, this to lo! did the process of his passion right well at the full declare.

Again, what a grievous and exceeding fear he felt in his senses for the bitter pangs that drew so fast upon him, do the words of the gospel here immediately following sufficiently testify:

'Then appeared unto him an angel from heaven, and comforted him.'

Oh how great anguish and heaviness was he then in, trow ye, when there came an angel from heaven to comfort him? But here can I not but much marvel. What the devil aileth them that let not to bear folk in hand, ³ that folly it were for a man to desire either any angel or any saint in heaven to pray unto God for him, because we may, say they, boldly make our prayer to God himself, who alone is more ready to help us than are the angels and saints, and set them altogether. And thereto is both able and willing to do us more good than all the saints in heaven beside.

With such foolish reasons and, to say the truth, nothing to the purpose at all, do these fond fellows for malice they bear against the honour of saints (and therefore may they look for as little favour of them again), go about as much as they may, both to withdraw our good affection from them, and to take away their wholesome help from us.

Why might not these wretches then with as good reason say that the comfort which this angel ministered unto our saviour Christ was utterly vain and needless? For among all the angels in heaven, who was either able to do so much for him as was himself alone, or so near at his elbow to assist him, as was God, and that was he himself? But like as it pleased his goodness for our sakes to suffer sorrow and anguish, so for our sakes vouchsafed he also by an angel to be comforted, thereby partly to confute these triflers' trifling reasons, and partly to prove himself to be a very man.

And likewise as angels came and did service unto him as God, when he had gloriously vanquished the temptations of the devil, so liked it him that as he was meekly going to his deathwards there should come to him as man, an angel to comfort him; and over that to put us in good hope, that if we in like manner in time of danger humbly do desire it, we shall not fail of comfort, so that we do it not coldly and hoverly, ³ but with deep sighs from the very bottom of our hearts do pray as Christ here giveth us the example.

'For being in an agony, he prayed along while and his sweat was as it had been drops of blood distilling down on the ground.'

The most part of all the doctors do for a truth affirm, that the passion which Christ suffered for us was a great deal more grievous than ever any martyr abode, that from thence hitherto suffered martyrdom for his faith. But some other be there of a contrary mind, because our saviour Christ, say they, had neither so many sundry kinds of torments, nor so many days together continued or renewed as those holy martyrs had. And further seeing one drop of his most precious blood, by reason of his eternal godhead, had been enough and more than enough to pay the ransom of all the whole world, therefore think they that God did not appoint him to suffer so much pain as ever any martyr did, but even so much as his unsearchable wisdom deemed to be most convenient, the stint ⁴ and rate whereof as no man perfectly knoweth, so reckoned they it against no point of our faith to believe that his pains were somewhat less than many of the martyrs' were.

But surely in my judgement, beside the common opinion of the Church, which aptly applieth unto Christ these words of Jeremias that were spoken of Jerusalem: 'O all ye that pass by the way, behold and see whether there be any sorrow like unto mine,' ⁵ this place, to that we be now

in hand withal, maketh me verily to be persuaded that never was there martyr's torment for pain comparable in sharpness with Christ's painful pangs.

Now if I would for my part grant (as upon good causes I have no need to do) that any martyr had both more and greater torments, yea and longer if ye will than Christ, yet methinketh it very likely, that he, though his pains seemed far less in appearance, abode yet far more exceeding anguish than any of the martyrs felt, all were it so that their grief appeared much greater, considering that he was so sore inwardly panged upon the dreadful sight of his bitter passion at hand, as never was man for any pain that was towards him. For whoever felt in himself such an agony that he sweat bloody drops throughout all his body, that streamed down to the ground?

Hereby do I gather, then, how great his smart was in the very time of his passion, since when he but foresaw it draw near unto him, he was so sore tormented as never was creature afore him.

Howbeit his anguish could not have grown so great neither as to cause his body sweat blood, had not his almighty godhead purposely determined, not to assuage and minish, but rather to increase and make those hideous griefs more, thereby both covertly to shew that his martyrs should afterwards likewise shed their blood here in earth for his sake, and therewithal by the marvellous strange example of his own incomparable heaviness, to encourage and comfort such as might perhaps else, upon the remembrance of dreadful pain, wax full sore afraid, and by misconstruing their own faint heart as a plain evidence that they should not be able to stand, thereupon desperately give over altogether.

Here again, if any man will reply and bring forth those martyrs, which in Christ's quarrel courageously, uncalled for, offered themselves to death, and judge them specially worthy to receive a triumphant crown in heaven, for that their joy so far surmounted their sorrow that no manner of signs and tokens of dread or discomfort could be perceived in them; in that point am I content he take me on his side too, so that he deny not them their reward also which, though they come not forth and offer themselves, do nevertheless, when they be laid hands on, neither draw back, nor strive thereat but, what fear and heaviness soever they be in, patiently yet for Christ's sake endure all that their hearts do full sore abhor.

Now whoso will stiffly say that they that thus offer themselves have higher reward in heaven than the other have, in this matter reason shall he alone for me, since for my purpose it is sufficient that either sort in heaven hath far greater glory than, while they lived here, they had either seen with their eyes, or heard with their ears, or in their hearts ever erst had conceived. In heaven how highly soever any man is advanced, therewith is none offended, but rather every one, so well they love each other, rejoiceth and hath his part in each other's advancement.

Beside this, for us that blindly go groping here in the dark vale of this miserable world, hard it is in mine opinion to know whom God doth in the bliss of heaven most gloriously advance. For as I will well agree that God loveth a glad and cheerful giver, so mistrust I never a deal, but that he loved Tobias well enough, and blessed Job likewise, and yet as either of them both with a bold courage patiently took their adversity, so was neither of them, as far as I can learn, very proud thereof or greatly rejoiced therein.

A man to offer himself to death for Christ, either when he is openly called to it, or else when God secretly stir-reth him thereunto, is a high point of virtue: to that I say not nay. Marry, otherwise to attempt it, I think it not the surest way. And we find that the very best and chief of them that willingly suffered for Christ, were at the first sore afraid and wonderfully troubled, and saved themselves from death oftener than once, which after for all that most courageously they refused not to suffer.

Yet I deny not, but that God can, and of truth among ' so doth, sometime in consideration of some holy martyr's former virtuous painful life, and sometime freely of his own mere goodness, so thoroughly ravish his heart with joy, that the same not only quite keepeth down all his troublesome pangs, but also so far driveth from him those first sudden passions which the Stoics call in Latin *propassiones*, and which by their own confession the wisest of their sect were not able to eschew, that he will not let him be once cumbered therewith. And seeing we see at our eye, that oft times it so fareth in a fray, that some men be sore wounded, and feel it not until their mind (which for the while was earnestly otherwise occupied) come to itself again, and so perceive their harm, I doubt it never a deal, but that the heart may be so ravished with the comfort of that glorious joy which is so near at hand, that neither shall it dread death nor taste the smart thereof.

Howbeit, if it please God to give unto any man such grace, this good hap would I account to come, either of the free gift of God, or to be as a reward of his godly virtue in time past, rather than to be any matter of merit after this life, since reward would I reckon to be proportioned after the rate of pain patiently taken for Christ's sake, saving that God, of his liberal bounty, with so good, so full, so well heaped, and so exceeding plenteous measure, ' recompenseth such pain, that all the trouble and afflictions of this world can in no wise countervail the glory that is to come, ' which shall be revealed in them that have here so entirely loved God that for the advancement of his honour, with great anguish and torment of heart and body, they have not letted " to spend their blood and therewithal their life too.

And what will you say if God other whiles of his goodness giveth some men the grace not to be afear'd at all? Not for that he most liketh and rewardeth such men's boldness, but that he knoweth them to be so faint-hearted that they were else like to give over for fear. For many of truth have there been, that at the first brunt have fearfully shrunk and fainted, and yet afterward valiantly passed through all the pain that was put upon them.

Now albeit I cannot deny, but that the example of them that suffer death with a bold and hardy courage, is right expedient for a great many to hearten them to do the like, yet on the other side, forasmuch as all the sort of us in effect be very timorous at the coming of death, who can tell how many take good by these folk too, which though they come to it, as we see, with much anguish and dread, do yet in conclusion manfully pass through those horrible strong stops of weariness, fear, and heaviness, and so, stoutly breaking all those violent lets, " do gloriously conquer death, and mightily get up into heaven? And do not these persons put other faint and feeble silly " souls, such I mean as they were themselves, in good courage and comfort, that in time of persecution, and although they feel themselves inwardly in never so sore trouble, dread, weariness, and horror of most cruel death, yet shall they not utterly yield and give over?

Therefore the provident wisdom of God, which pierceth all things mightily, and disposeth all things pleasantly, ¹³ presently foreseeing how and in what wise sundry men's minds be inclined in sundry times and places, tempereth examples of either sort of folk according as the time and place requireth, even as he espieth it to be most for their behoof. ¹⁴ So of his high providence doth he moderate the hearts of his blessed martyrs, that some joyfully speed them towards their death apace, and some other right sore afraid creep fair and softly thither. Who nevertheless, when they come to the pinch, do die with as good a stomach as the other, except some will percase count them not so valiant, because beside the overthrow of the rest of their adversaries, they do also master their own weariness, sorrow, and fear, three most violent affections and three most cruel enemies.

But now doth the whole sum of all our talk finally rest in this point, that both sorts of these most holy martyrs ought we to have in admiration and reverence, and in them both laud and praise God, and as need requireth, each man as he is able, follow the steps of them both as near as God will give us grace.

Howbeit he that thus feeleth himself bold and hardy hath little need of comfort to encourage him, but perhaps rather need of counsel, to put him in fear that he do not presume too much of himself, as Peter did, and thereby suddenly stumble and take a fall. But on the other side, he that feeleth himself heavy, sorrowful, and timorous, this man, lo! hath much need of comfort to strengthen him and pluck up his heart again.

Now unto either of these two sorts is this heaviness of Christ very good and profitable, to repress the overbold courage of the one, and to recomfort and relieve the faint feeble spirit of the other. For like as he that seeth himself so eager and stout, when he shall remember how humble and heavy a plight his captain Christ was in, shall haply find good cause to fear, lest his crafty enemy for the while so set him up on high, soon after to his greater grief to cast him down as low; so he that is over-fearful and faint-hearted, and standeth in much dread of himself; lest he might mishap through despair to take a fall, may have before his face this bitter agony of Christ, and ever more bethink him and muse thereupon, and so of this pure fountain drink many a wholesome draft of ghostly consolation and comfort, since here shall he behold how our most loving shepherd vouchsafeth to take up his weak, silly ¹⁵ sheep upon his own shoulders and to play his part himself, and in his own person to express his affections, to the end that, whoso in time coming should feel himself in like sort troubled, might receive comfort thereby and be void of all despair.

Let us therefore give him as hearty thanks as we may (for surely so great as he hath deserved are we not able to give him) and in our agonies bearing in mind his agony (to whose agony never was there agony comparable) let us most instantly beseech him, that at the contemplation of his own hideous anguish, it would the rather please him to comfort us in ours. And whensoever we earnestly sue unto him, by his help to be delivered from the danger of our troublesome anguish, let us ever, as he gave us a right good example himself, end our petition with the self-same clause wherewith he ended his, 'yet not as I will, but as it liketh thee.'

If we diligently so do, I little doubt it but that like as an angel came unto him to comfort him as he was thus in his prayer, so shall we likewise from his holy spirit receive such comfort every

one of us by our good angel as shall make us strong and able to endure those terrible storms, through which we shall sty ¹⁶ up straightways to heaven.

And to put us in some hope hereof, in like sort went Christ thither the selfsame way before us. For after he had long, to his no little pain, continued in his agony, such ghostly consolation received he, that as soon as he had visited his apostles again, straight rose he up and of his own accord did he go forth to meet the false traitor and the other tormentors that so busily sought to bring him to his passion.

Then when he had so suffered as was for us expedient, he entered into his glorious kingdom, there to prepare us a place, so we forswore ¹⁷ not to follow his example. And that our slothful sluggishness do not these (?thence) clearly exclude us we humbly beseech him that for his own bitter agony, he will vouchsafe to help us in ours.

'And after he was risen up from his prayer and came to his disciples, he found them sleeping for heaviness. And he said unto them: Why sleep ye? Sleep on now and take your rest. It is enough. Rise and pray that ye enter not into temptation. Lo, the hour is coming, and the son of man shall be delivered into the hands of sinners. Arise, let us go. Behold he that shall betray me is here at hand.'

Here lo! whereas Christ returned to his apostles the third time and found them fast asleep, albeit he had so straitly charged them there still to tarry with him and, for the great danger that was toward, continually to watch and pray, and that in the mean season the traitorous wretch Judas was so busily bent to betray his own lord and master, that he had no leisure left him so much as to think of any sleeping; in these two sorts of folk, the traitor I mean and the apostles, in their doings so far unlike, is there not set forth before us, as it were in a mirror or glass, a plain, and therewithal an heavy and horrible resemblance of the course of the world, even from that time hitherto? Why should not bishops here behold and see their own sloth and sluggishness which, would God, like as they succeed into the apostles' places, so would in their lives represent unto us their virtues, and that with no less diligence than they be glad to take upon them their authority, and do nevertheless full truly follow their slothful sluggish sleeping.

For even as slow and dull are a great many of them to set forth virtue amongst the people and to maintain the truth, as Christ's enemies all that while diligently watch and travail to set up vice and lewdness and to destroy the faith; which is, as much as in them lieth, to lay hands upon Christ and cruelly crucify him again. So much more wily, as saith Christ, are the children of darkness in their kind, than are the children of light. ¹⁸

And albeit this similitude of apostles thus sleeping may aptly be applied unto those bishops which lie carelessly and sleep full sound, while virtue and true religion are like to run to ruin, yet cannot it well be applied unto them all, at the least wise in every point, since some be there among them, more by a great many (the more pity, alas, it is) than I would wish there were, which fall in a slumber, not for sorrow and heaviness as the apostles did, but like a sort of swine wallowing in the mire, lie fast slugging in the dead sleep of their mischievous blind affections, as men all drowned and drunken with the pleasant must of the devil, the flesh, and the world. But of truth though it were a disposition in the apostles commendable enough to be sorrowful for their

master's danger, yet that they were so overcome with sorrow that they did nought else but sleep, this was without all peradventure ¹⁹ somewhat a fault indeed.

And likewise to be sorry when the world waxeth naught, and to bewail other folks' offences, this surely cometh of a well-disposed mind, as he evidently perceived which said: 'I sat alone and wept.' ²⁰ And in another place thus: 'I fainted for sorrow of sinful persons while they forsook thy law.' ²¹

This kind of heaviness may I aptly apply to that kind of heaviness that the prophet speaketh of here. But then must I so apply it, that this disposition, how good soever it be, must yet be ruled and governed by reason. For else if the mind be so drowned and oppressed with sorrow, that the courage thereof being stricken stark dead, reason giveth quite over her hold and government, and like as a faint-hearted master of a ship being discouraged at the bare noise of a storm or tempest, shrinketh from the stern, and dolefully getting himself into some several corner, suffereth the ship alone to weigh ²² with the waves, so if a bishop fall in such a deadly sleep for sorrow, that he leaveth those things undone, which for the wealth of his flock his duty bindeth him unto, this kind of discomfort, lo! may I be bold to compare with that kind of heaviness which, as witnesseth the scripture, leadeth the straight way to hell. And to say the truth may I count it much worse too, forasmuch as in God's cause he seemeth utterly to be in despair of God.

Next unto this sort may there be placed, but yet a great deal beneath them, another sort which are cast into a discomfortable dullness, not so much for other folks' harm, as for fear of their own. And therefore the less the thing that their fear riseth upon ought to be regarded, by so much the more sinful is their fear, as where there hangeth over them no bodily peril at all, but haply some loss of worldly wealth and substance, whereas Christ would have us little pass ²³ to lose our lives in his quarrel. 'For fear ye not,' saith he, 'those that can kill the body, and after that have no more to do; but I will show you whom you ought to fear. Fear him that after he hath killed the body, hath power beside to cast it into hell. So I say unto you, fear him.' ²⁴

Now seeing that he setteth forth this commandment generally unto all men, when they be in such taking that they can by no shift avoid, then unto bishops for the honour he hath put them in, giveth he a greater charge besides, as the men whom he would not have careful for their own souls alone, and keep themselves out of the way in corners, and hold their peace till they be fetched forth, and enforced either openly to profess their belief, or falsely dissimule ²⁵ it, but if they see their flock likely to fall in any jeopardy, boldly to step forth, and so it might turn to the behoof ²⁶ of their flock, willingly offer to put their lives in hazard.

For a good shepherd, saith Christ, letteth not ²⁷ to bestow his life for his sheep. ²⁸ Then if every good shepherd letteth not to adventure his life for the safeguard of his sheep, you may be sure that he which saveth his life, and thereby hurteth his sheep, playeth no good shepherd's part. Wherefore likewise as he that is content to lose his life for Christ's sake (and for Christ's sake doth he lose it, whosoever at Christ's commandment loseth it for his flock) doth unto everlasting life undoubtedly preserve it, so on the other side he that forsaketh Christ (as he doth that to the great hurt of his flock holdeth his peace and leaveth the truth unspoken) this man by the saving of his life, taketh the right way to lose it altogether. And how much more grievous is his offence, that for fear in plain terms denieth him and openly forsaketh him.

Such as these be, sleep not with Peter, but like Peter broad waking even plainly fall from him; howbeit yet at length when Christ shall mercifully cast his eye upon them, through his gracious aid, by wholesome tears and sorrow for their fault, may purchase their pardon therefor, so that they at Christ's merciful look and gentle call unto remembrance, having good remembrance of his words, and consideration of his passion, and sequestering themselves from those wretched fetters that have so long holden them in sin, be as willing for their parts with contrition and penance to return again unto him.

But now if there be any man so far grown in wickedness that he hideth not the truth for any fear at all, but like Arius and his fellows spreadeth abroad false doctrine either for lucre or for devilish ambition, such a one neither sleepeth with Peter, nor denieth Christ with Peter, but watcheth with wicked Judas, and with Judas pursueth Christ. In how perilous a case this person above all other especially standeth in, doth the despiteous ²⁹ and horrible end of Judas very well declare. And yet since the merciful goodness of God is infinite and endless, no cause hath this sort of sinners neither to despair of God's mercy. Full many an occasion to cause him to amend gave God even unto Judas.

For neither did he cast him out of his company, nor put him from the dignity of his apostleship, nor as strong a thief as he was took he not from him the keeping of his purse. Besides this at his maundy ³⁰ and last supper, he vouchsafed to admit this traitor among the rest of his dear beloved apostles, and disdained not also to stoop down full low at the very traitor's feet, and there to wash them as filthy as they were (and indeed unlike were they not his corrupt cankered heart), yea and that with his own innocent and most holy hands.

Over this, of his incomparable bounty, unto this false traitor delivered he to eat under the form of bread that selfsame blessed body of his, that he had so late made merchandise of before, and in form of wine gave he unto him that precious blood of his to drink, which the traitorous wretch, at this same very time while he was drinking thereof, devised most sinfully to shed. And in conclusion when he and his band was come for to take him, and that he there offered to kiss him, which was the privy token of his abominable treason, he most mildly and meekly refused not to receive him.

Who would not have weened that any one of all these things should have moved his traitorous heart, as much as he was set upon mischief, to relent and take better ways?

Moreover as touching the beginning of his repentance, whereas he confessed he had not done well, and thereupon brought back their thirty groats again, and forasmuch as they could not be received threw them quite from him, and even then openly called himself traitor, and plainly protested also that he had betrayed an innocent, in all this while may I well think that our saviour secretly wrought in his heart, to the intent if it had been possible, that is to say, if the traitor to his treason had not joined despair, he might have preserved that same wretch from destruction, which then so lately had gone about most traitorously to contrive his death.

Considering therefore that by so many manner of ways it is apparently perceived how God took marvellous compassion of this Judas all were he ³¹ from an apostle fallen to be a traitor, and so

sundry times excited him to purchase his pardon, and would not suffer him any other wise to miscarry, but only through his own despair, surely cause is there none for any man to be in despair of other, as long as he live here, were he as bad as Judas altogether, but rather as the apostle giveth us gracious counsel where he saith: 'Pray each of ye for other that ye may come to salvation.'³²

If we mishap to see any man stray far out of the way, let us still have good hope that at last he will return again, and in the mean season in humble wise incessantly pray, that both it may please God to grant him grace to amend, and that he likewise for his part, by God's help, may gladly receive it, keep it when he hath it, and neither sinfully cast it off, nor through his own sloth wretchedly after lose it.

So when Christ had found his apostles now thrice together asleep, he said unto them: 'Why sleep ye?' As one would say: 'It is no time for you to sleep now, but needly must you watch and pray, whereof I have twice already given you warning but late.'

And whereas they at the second time that they were taken asleep wist not what answer to make him, now being taken tardy in the self same fault a third time, and that so soon again, what excuse reasonable could they devise for themselves? Would that that the Evangelist reciteth have served them for their discharge, if they had told him they fell asleep for sorrow? But as for that, though St. Luke so sayeth indeed, yet truly doth he not commend it. Nevertheless he, though not by express words, doth yet mean no less, but that their sorrow was (as of truth it might be rightly counted) nothing at all to be misliked. But for all that, their sleeping afterward could be by no colour excused. For that kind of heaviness that might be otherwise greatly rewardable in heaven turneth some time to our great hurt and hindrance. As thus I mean, if we be so drowned therein that we make it to stand us in no stead, inasmuch as we have not recourse to God by devout and fervent prayer, desiring at his hand to be comforted, but faring like folk all comfortless, dismayed, and desperate, as though we could thereby escape the feeling of our grief and trouble, seek to comfort ourselves with sleep, and yet never the more obtain we thereby the relief that we so much labour for. And so having utterly lost that consolation which by watch in prayer we might have purchased of God, do, even while we are asleep, feel the woeful weight of our restless heart, and in our woeful blindness fall into temptations and into the wily trains³³ of the devil.

Now then, to cut off all excuse and colour of such slothful sleeping, said Christ unto them thus: 'Why sleep ye? Sleep on now and rest. It sufficeth. Arise and pray that ye fall not into temptation. Lo! the hour is almost come, and the Son of Man shall be delivered into the hands of sinners. Arise, let us go. Behold here is he at hand that shall betray me. And while Jesus was thus speaking, lo! Judas Iscariot and so forth.'

When Christ had thus three times awaked his sleepy apostles, incontinent thereupon began he not slightly and in sport, as idle jesters are commonly wont to do, but with an earnest and sharp biting scorn, to rebuke them, and said unto them thus: 'Sleep on now and take your rest. It is enough. Arise and pray that ye fall not into temptation. Lo! the hour draweth near and the Son of Man shall be delivered into the hands of sinners. Arise, let us go. Lo! he is not far off that shall betray

Me.’ And while he spake these words, came Judas and so forth.

In such wise lo! doth Christ here licence his apostles to sleep, that it may right well appear he meant to refrain them from it. For he had no sooner said ‘Sleep,’ but he added by and by: ‘It is enough,’ as though he would say: ‘You have no need to sleep any longer now, since it is more than enough that all this while in which ye ought most specially to have watched, ye have contrary to my commandment slept. Now have ye no more leisure to sleep, no nor to sit neither. But rise must ye straightways and get you to your prayers, that ye fall not into temptation, by means whereof may ye mishap to your no little danger shamefully to forsake me. For as for sleeping, were it not therefor, ye should for me, if ye could, sleep and take your rest. But be ye assured, if you would, it shall not lie in your prayer, ³⁴ so fast draw they hitherward and are even almost come, which will keep you well enough from sleep, as careless as you be. For lo! the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man shall be taken into the hands of sinners; and look, he is not far hence that shall betray me.’

And scantily had he given them this little short admonition, but that while he was thus speaking unto them, came lo! Judas Iscariot and so forth.

I am not ignorant that certain both learned and right holy men do not like this exposition. And yet deny they not but that other good men, and learned too, have liked it well enough. And these folk that have liked it think not that kind of scorn strange, as have some other done, and they right godly and virtuous, howbeit not thoroughly acquainted with those phrases which, taken out of the common speech, are much used in holy scripture. For if they had, they should so often have found it elsewhere that in this place it could never have offended them. For in scorn what could have been spoken more nippingly, and therewith all the more properly, than where the blessed apostle merrily taunted the Corinthians, desiring them to pardon him because he had put none of them to cost and charge. ‘What is there,’ saith he, ‘wherein I have done less for you than for other churches, saving that I have not been burdenous unto you? Forgive me this fault.’ ³⁵

Or what greater taunt or more biting could there lightly be, than that wherewith the prophet of God mocked the prophets of Baal, while they called him and cried out upon his deaf image? ‘Cry louder,’ quoth he, ‘for your God is asleep, or gone peradventure into some other country.’ ³⁶

These places thought I good to bring forth here by the way, for the satisfying of them which (for that of an honest simplicity they cannot abide, or at leastwise do not perceive, these phrases of speech customably used in scripture) while they refused to admit such figures, do full often swerve likewise from the true sense and meaning of the scripture.

Howbeit St. Augustine upon this place granteth that though he misliketh not this foresaid declaration, yet he thinketh it not to be of any necessity, since the plain words, weaneth he, without figure were sufficient. And for a proof hereof, himself doth expound the same place in that work which he wrote *De Concordia Evangelistarum* as followeth.

‘St. Matthew in these words,’ saith he, ‘seemeth to be contrary to himself.’ For how could he say: ‘Sleep on now and rest ye,’ when he added by and by after: ‘Arise and let us go?’ By reason of which contrariety, as it seemeth in appearance, some go about so to pro-nounce these fore-

remembered words: 'Sleep on now and rest ye,' as though Christ, in his so saying, had rebuked them therefor, and not licenced them so to do. Which exposition might well stand if it were needful. But seeing St. Mark doth rehearse the matter thus, that when he had said: 'Sleep on now and rest ye,' he forthwith adjoined: 'It is enough,' and afterward immediately added: 'The hour is come, lo! the Son of Man shall be betrayed,' it is to be understanden that our Lord after he had said unto them: 'Sleep on now and rest ye,' paused there awhile to the end they might sleep a little, as he licenced them to do; and then at length said unto them: 'Lo! the hour draweth on.' And therefore it is written in St. Mark: 'It is sufficient,' that is to wit, that ye have hitherto rested.' ³⁷

Thus hath this blessed doctor St. Augustine full wittily, ³⁸ as he doth in all his doings, shewed his opinion upon this place. But they that liked better the other exposition, deemed it not likely, I trow, that Christ which had already twice sharply reprov'd his apostles for sleeping, because he was then in so present peril to be taken, would upon these his biting words: 'Why sleep ye?' immediately after give them respite to sleep, namely ³⁹ at that season when the thing, for which they should have forborn sleeping before, was even now in manner already come to pass.

Howbeit now that I have here set forth these two expositions, every man shall be at his liberty to follow whether of them him list. I thought it enough for me to show you them both, and not to take upon me having so little skill as a judge to determine one way or other therein.

'Arise and pray that ye fall not into temptation.'

First willed he his apostles to watch and pray. But now after they had twice by experience in themselves learned that, through slothful sitting, unawares they fell asleep, for a ready remedy against that sluggish sleepy sickness, gave he them this lesson to rise. Which kind of remedy like as our saviour himself did teach it, so would I wish that now and then among, ⁴⁰ we would even at midnight assay it. And if we so did, then should we find not only that true that Horace saith: 'He hath half done that hath once well begun,' but also that he hath in effect all done that hath once well begun. For in striving to avoid sleep, ever more at the first brunt is the greatest conflict of all.

Wherefore we may not think by little and little to wrestle therewith and so to shake it off, but as soon as it fawneth upon us, and as it were embraceth us, and layeth us down along, we must at once with all our might stoutly cast it off, and as speedily as we can, labour to break therefrom. Which heavy slothful sleep, the very image of death, when we have once driven away, incontinent will ensue a lively lusty courage.

Then if we give ourselves to meditation and prayer, we shall feel our hearts, being kept close in that dead dark time of the night, much more apt to receive comfort at God's hand than in the ruffle ⁴¹ of the day while we shall have our eyes, our ears, and all our mind on every side, cumbered and busied with so many peevish and sundry light matters.

But, O merciful saviour, whereas the bare thinking upon some trifling worldly thing sometime so bereaveth us of our sleep, that a long while after it doth keep us waking, and scanty suffereth us again to sleep at all; now while we might purchase us so great profit to our soul's ward, ⁴² while our mortal enemy layeth so manifold traps and trains to take us, and while we stand in so great

hazard to be utterly undone for ever, for all this wake we never the more to pray, but lie full fast asleep, our minds all occupied with mad fantastical dreams. ⁴³

But here must we still have in remembrance, that Christ bade them not only rise, but bade them rise and pray, since it is not enough to rise, unless we rise for some good purpose. Else offendeth he much more, that sinfully and maliciously watcheth in wickedness, than doth he that lewdly loseth his time in sloth and sleep.

And yet he not only willed them to pray, but besides that he shewed them how needful it was to pray, and taught them also for what they should pray. 'Pray,' said he, 'that ye fall not into temptation.'

This one point did he continually beat into their heads, that prayer was a special aid and garrison to preserve them from temptation. Which whoso refuseth to receive into the castle of his soul, and by reason of sluggishness will not suffer it therein to enter, licenceth thereby the devil's soldiers who on every side doth environ it, his devilish temptations I mean, through his foolish negligence, by main force to invade it.

Now as he with his own mouth thrice advised them to pray, so because he would not by his word only, but by his example too, teach them so to do, he in his own person did thrice the same himself; signifying unto us that we must pray unto the Trinity, that is to wit, the unbegotten Father, and the Son of him begotten equal with his Father, and the Holy Ghost likewise equal with them both and proceeding from them both.

Of these three persons three things must we pray. For pardon for that is already past, grace to go through with that we have in hand, and wisdom warily to foresee what is to come. And this must we do not carelessly and hoverly, ⁴⁴ but devoutly and continually. From which kind of prayer, how far wide we be nowadays almost all the many ⁴⁵ of us, both every man's own conscience can show him well enough; and I beseech God that the small fruit that every day less and less doth grow there-upon, do not little and little openly at length declare it.

But forasmuch as I have here a little before inveighed as vehemently as I could against that manner of prayer where the mind, for want of earnest devotion, strayeth and wandereth about many other matters, now at this present because I would be loath, like a churlish surgeon, over boisterously to handle so common a sore whereby I might mishap to some feeble-spirited folk, not to minister a salve to ease them, but rather increase their pain, and therewith put them quite out of all comfort ever to be whole again, I have thought good to take out of M. John Gerson a plaster ⁴⁶ for them, which somewhat may assuage their grief. Who to cure the fervent anguish of the sore distempered soul, useth certain suaging salves, which are in operation in their kind much like unto those salves and plasters in Greek called *anodina*, that serve to ease and temper the aches of the body.

This John Gerson, an excellent learned man and a gentle handler of a troubled conscience, because, I trow, he saw some persons, for fault of minding their prayers, in themselves so much discomforted, that often times tediously without any need they were fain to repeat twice every word they said in their prayer, and yet were always never the nearer, insomuch that some time

after one thing thrice repeated, they more disliked the last than the first, whereupon they conceived such weariness that they utterly lost all comfort of praying, and also for that some were likely to have given over their good custom therein for altogether, as a thing to them that so prayed either fruitless or as they feared hurtful too, this virtuous man, I say, somewhat to assuage their grief in this behalf considered there are in prayer three things to be noted, the act, the virtue, and the habit; and for the plainer declaration of his meaning herein, he setteth forth the matter by an example of one that goeth in pilgrimage out of France unto St. James, * who some while both goeth forward on his journey, and there-withal hath his mind occupied, not only upon the saint that he is going unto, but also of the good purpose that he goeth thither for.

Now doth this man all this while two ways actually continue his pilgrimage, that is to wit, as Master Gerson in the Latin tongue termeth it: *c ontinuitate naturae et continuitate moris*; in a natural continuance, and in a moral continuance. In a natural continuance, in that he doth actually, that is to say in very deed, go forth toward that place. And in a moral continuance, for that his thought always runneth upon the matter of his pil-grimage. And he thus calleth it a moral continuance, by reason of that moral circumstance, whereby his going thither, being otherwise of itself indifferent, is in con-sideration of the virtuous intent he took that journey for become good and godly.

And some whiles he goeth forward on his journey when his mind is otherwise occupied, as where he mindeth neither the saint nor the place he goeth unto, but haply hath far better meditations, as while his mind runneth still upon God; now here continueth he his pilgrimage by a natural continuance as Gerson calleth it, but yet not by a moral continuance. For though he actually go forward on his voyage, yet hath he no mind actually neither of the cause of his pilgrimage, nor of his way perhaps neither. And so albeit he doth not continue his pilgrimage in moral action, yet doth he continue it morally in goodness, since the godly purpose he had at the beginning, which is privily implied in everything he doth therewhiles, giveth a moral goodness unto the whole process of his journey. Forasmuch as of the good intent he had at the first, hath all that ever he did after-ward followed and ensued, even as a stone fleeth forth apace with a mighty throw, though the hand that threw it be drawn clean therefrom.

And sometimes is there a moral action when there is no natural at all, as when he sitteth him down and peradventure bethinketh him of his pilgrimage and goeth not one foot forward all the while. Finally so falleth it more times than a few, that both lacketh there a natural action and a moral too, as while he is asleep, at which time neither goeth the pilgrim by no natural action forward on his pilgrimage, nor by no moral action doth he any whit mind it neither. Howbeit in all this mean-while doth the moral goodness, as long as he changeth not his former purpose, habitually persevere still. So that of truth never is this pilgrimage in such sort discontinued, but that at the leastwise it endureth and remaineth habitually to his merit still, unless he determine the contrary, that is, either clearly to cast it off, or else to defer it until some other season. By this example of pilgrimage he expresseth the nature of prayer, as thus that prayer once devoutly begun can never after in such wise be interrupted but that the good-ness of the first good purpose continueth and remaineth, actually, I mean, or habitually, as long as we neither leave it off willingly nor by the let * of some deadly sin lose the fruit thereof.

Hereupon saith Master Gerson that these words of Christ: 'Pray must you continually without intermission,' ⁴⁰ were spoken by no figure, but are to be taken plainly as they sound. Which precept good men and godly even as the words lie do verily accomplish. And this his opinion doth he verify by an old common saying among learned men. 'He that liveth well always prayeth,' meaning that whosoever, according to the appointment of the apostle, doth all things to the glory of God, can never after so break off his prayer once attentively begun, but that the goodness thereof, though not actually yet evermore habitually, faileth not to remain with him towards his merit in heaven.

These things doth Master John Gerson, a man of profound learning and excellent virtue, set forth in that work of his which he entitled: 'Of Prayer, and the Worthi-ness of the same.' Who albeit he doth so say to comfort such faint-hearted persons as be overmuch troubled for that, in the time of their prayer, take they never so great pain to set their minds thereon, yet suddenly unawares is it carried clean away, nothing less intendeth for all that than to put other in a foolish wrong belief, as though they were in no peril at all, while they be so careless that they little pass ⁵⁰ anything to mind their prayers at all.

And forsooth when we do negligently go about a matter of such importance, prayers do we say indeed, but pray do we never a deal, nor thereby, as I before said, procure we not God's favour towards us, but purchase his indignation and drive him clearly from us.

For verily what marvel is it though God be wonderfully displeased, when he seeth a silly ⁵¹ wretched man so carelessly call upon him. And cometh not he and speaketh unto God carelessly, that with his tongue saith: 'Hear, good Lord, my prayer,' and yet hath his heart all the while far from him, occupied upon vain foolish trifles, yea and sometime God give grace it be not upon very wicked things and abominable, insomuch that he heareth not what he saith himself, but mumbling up his ordinary accustomed prayers at adventure, maketh, as Virgil ⁵² writeth, a noise, nothing minding the matter.

And after we have done our prayers, for the most part in such sort go we our ways, that we had need straightways to pray again afresh, to desire pardon of God for our negligence in the first.

Christ therefore, when he said unto his apostles: 'Arise and pray, that ye fall not into temptation,' because he would have them know that a sleeping and cold prayer sufficed not, gave them warning by and by what danger hung over their heads.

'Lo!' quoth he, 'the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man shall be delivered into the hands of sinners.' As who should say: 'I told you before, that one of you would betray me; at which word of mine were ye much dismayed. I told you also that the devil went busily about to sift you like wheat, but you forced ⁵³ not much thereon, for none answer made ye thereunto, as though his temptation were little to be passed on. ⁵⁴ But I, to make you perceive how sore a thing temptation was, told ye before that you would all forsake me. And ye answered me all that ye would never do so. Yea, and unto him that made himself surest of all told I before too that ere ever the cock crew, thrice would he deny me. Yet said he still precisely nay, and that he would rather die with me, than once deny me. And so saith all the many ⁵⁵ of ye.

‘And because you should not set so lightly by temptation, I straitly charged ye with all diligence to watch and pray, that ye fall not into temptation. And ye yet still took so small regard what force and violence temptation is of, that for the avoiding thereof ye cared neither to watch nor pray. Ye were peradventure the bolder little to esteem all the devil's violent temptations, for that when I sent you forth long since, two and two together, to preach abroad the faith, at your return again ye shewed me that even the wicked spirits were become thrall and subject unto you. Howbeit I which know both them and ye too much better than ye do yourselves, as he that made both, advised ye then out of hand that ye should not overmuch glory in any such peevish vanity, considering that that power which ye had over wicked spirits came not of your own strength, but was procured ye by me, and that not for your own sakes neither, but for other that should be converted to the faith. But I bade ye rejoice rather in that that ye might always be assured of, as that your names were written in the book of life, seeing that joy should be wholly yours, inasmuch as when ye had once attained the same, ye could never lose it after, were all the devils in hell never so much bent against ye.

‘All this notwithstanding, the dominion that ye had then upon them hath so boldened ye that, as it seemeth, ye take their temptations to be of very small importance. And for this cause even hitherto, for all the foreknowledge I gave ye what danger was toward you this selfsame present night, yet did ye no more pass on there than if ye had been nothing near them.

‘But now do I give you plain warning that the hour now almost is come and not the night alone. For lo! the hour draweth on, and the Son of Man shall be delivered into the hands of sinners. Then have ye now no longer leisure left ye to sit and sleep, but watch must ye needs. And as ⁵⁶ praying, thereto have ye in manner no respite at all. So from henceforth speak I not unto you as of a thing to come, but I charge you straightways, as the case ye be presently in requireth: Arise and let us go, lo! here is he at hand that shall betray me. If ye list not to watch that ye may fall to prayer, yet at the least-wise arise and get ye hence apace lest it shall not lie in your power to avoid an ye would. For lo! he that shall betray me is even almost here.’

Unless peradventure he spake these words: ‘Arise and let us go,’ because he would not have them shrink away for fear, but rather to make them go forth and boldly meet their enemies, like as he did himself, who drew not backward another way from them, but incontinent after these words spoken went willingly himself towards them which maliciously came to murder him.

From *St. Thomas More's History of the Passion*, Ed. P. E. Hallett, Trans. Mary Bassett. London: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd, 1941, pp. 45-74.

¹ especially.

² i.e. that will not stop trying to deceive people.

³ superficially.

⁴ amount, proportion.

⁵ Lam. i, 12.

⁶ I Cor. ii, 9.

⁷ sometimes.

⁸ Luke vi, 38.

⁹ Rom. viii, 18.

¹⁰ hesitated.

- ¹¹ hindrances.
- ¹² poor, miserable.
- ¹³ Wisdom viii, 1.
- ¹⁴ advantage.
- ¹⁵ miserable, poor.
- ¹⁶ ascend.
- ¹⁷ neglect.
- ¹⁸ Luke xvi, 8.
- ¹⁹ doubt.
- ²⁰ Lam., cf. Preface and iii, 28.
- ²¹ Ps. cxviii, 158.
- ²² sail.
- ²³ i.e. to think it a small thing.
- ²⁴ Matt. x, 28.
- ²⁵ hide.
- ²⁶ advantage.
- ²⁷ hesitateth.
- ²⁸ John x, 11.
- ²⁹ violent.
- ³⁰ the washing of the feet of the disciples, from *mandatum* (John xiii, 34), the first word of the antiphon sung at the annual repetition of the ceremony on Maundy Thursday.
- ³¹ although he were.
- ³² James v, 16.
- ³³ deceits.
- ³⁴ The Latin *non poteritis* suggests that Rastell should have printed ‘power.’
- ³⁵ 2 Cor. xii, 13.
- ³⁶ 3 Kings xviii, 27.
- ³⁷ This passage is translated from St. Augustine's *De Consensu* (not *Concordia*) *Evangelistarum*. Migne, P.L., xxxiv, 1164-5.
- ³⁸ wisely.
- ³⁹ especially.
- ⁴⁰ sometimes.
- ⁴¹ turmoil.
- ⁴² defence.
- ⁴³ Rastell prints in the margin the following note, presumably from Mrs. Basset's MS.: ‘Whereas the Latin text hath here *somnia speculantes Mandragorae*, I have translated it in English “our minds all occupied with mad fantastical dreams,” because *Man-dragora* is a herb, as physicians say, that causeth folk to sleep, and therein to have many mad fantastical dreams.’
- ⁴⁴ superficially.
- ⁴⁵ multitude.
- ⁴⁶ remedy.
- ⁴⁷ i.e. Compostella.
- ⁴⁸ hindrance.
- ⁴⁹ Luke xviii, 1.
- ⁵⁰ care, trouble.
- ⁵¹ miserable, poor.

⁵² More's quotation is from Aen. x, 640.

⁵³ cared, troubled.

⁵⁴ cared about.

⁵⁵ company.

⁵⁶ as for.